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Public perceptions of the favelas in Rio de Janeiro: a post World Cup 2014 and pre 2016 Olympics Assessment

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Abstract

This research assesses public perception of the favelas of Rio de Janeiro following the awarding of the bids for both the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics. In preparation of these mega sports events, Rio has been challenged to improve infrastructure, build Olympic venues and reduce crime in the favelas. The purpose of the research is to collect data on the perceptions of potential visitors to Brazil, specifically, Rio de Janeiro to determine if the preparation for and hosting of the mega sports events is changing the image of the favelas.
Keywords: Rio de Janeiro, favela, tourism, World Cup, Olympics, perceptions

1 Introduction

Rio de Janeiro is known as one of the most exotic and iconic tourism destinations of the world because of its dramatic location on the coast in the Brazilian Atlantic Rainforest. The golden age of travel to Rio de Janeiro was from the early 1920's to 1950's when international celebrities and high society came to stay in the grand hotels of the period such as the Gloria Hotel (1922) and the Copacabana Palace (1924). Rio was an intriguing, romantic destination with casinos and live performances in local nightclubs. However, Rio has not always been one of the most desirable destinations in the world (Lonely Planet [1]).

In 1960 the capital of Brazil was moved from Rio to Brasilia. During this period, modernization destroyed some of the historic buildings of Rio and skyscrapers were built in their places. Simultaneously, shanty towns (favelas) grew in size and number

due to mass immigration of people from the rural northeast of Brazil who were looking for employment in Rio. At the same time, there was an increase in crime and violence [1].

Tourism to Rio declined during the military dictatorship period between 1964 to 1985. Unrest prevailed in the city and the military regime retaliated by withholding funds that would have been used to maintain the city's infrastructure. As a result, the city went into further decline.

It was not until 1992 when Rio was selected as the site for the United Nation's Conference on Environment and Development that the federal government spent about $1 billion dollars on the city infrastructure.   In 2007 and 2009 when Brazil received the bid for two mega sports events – the World Cup 2014 and Olympics 2016, consecutively, the world's attention became focused on Rio.   The authorities realized they needed to deal not only with the infrastructure, but also the image and reputation as being a destination with a high crime rate. Crime is particularly high in the numerous favelas where 1.5 million people or 22% of the population live in Rio (Williamson [2]).

Beginning in the 1970s, many non-government organizations (NGOs) stepped in to address some of the social problems prevalent in Rio. Today there are 338,000 NGOs addressing a variety of social issues (Mello [3]). The mission of many of these NGOs is to give a voice to the people living in the favelas and to assure that there is more equity in the availability of health care and education. One of these NGOs conducts surveys to gather data on public sentiment that often has an impact on policy decisions about the favelas in Rio.

2 Review of Literature

2.1 History of the favelas of Rio de Janeiro

Favelas are often inappropriately described as Brazilian slums with squalor, substandard housing and residents who are land squatters and have no legal property rights. Favelas are typically located in or close to urban areas. A more accurate definition of a favela according to Williamson [2] is "squatter settlements where people occupied the land illegally due to the lack of access to affordable public housing in the late 19th and early 20th century." The Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatistical reported that in 2010,of the residents of Rio lived in favelas. This 2010 statistic reflects an increase of 18.7% from 2000 (Hurrell [4]).

These settlements are not always built with scrap materials such as cardboard boxes, corrugated metal and sheets of plastic. As a matter of fact, numerous homes in the favela are built of brick, concrete and reinforced steel.   Many of the favela residents are employed as construction workers, domestics, cashiers, bus drivers and restaurant/hotel workers (Life in favela of Rocinha, Rio de Janeiro [5]). Even when some favela residents become more financially sustainable, they refrain from moving

away from the favela because of the family ties and the sense of community that they have experienced while living there.

Typically Brazil's favelas have been plagued by armed gangs and drug traffickers. One may wonder why there are gangs and drug traffickers in the favela. Over the years, gangs, often called a "shadow government", developed a social contract with the favela inhabitants in that they provided electricity, organized block parties, repaired roads and gave food to hungry families. In addition to dealing drugs and organizing prostitution rings, the gangs provided basic services not being supplied by the government. Historically, gambling was the first organized crime in Rio's favelas. Favela residents developed a type of loyalty to the gangs who used the funds generated from gambling to protect and provide jobs for the favela residents. During the 1980's when the cocaine market expanded, the gangs started dealing cocaine. In the favelas, gangs were the police force and they did not let crime happen unless it was their crime (Massimo [6]).

When Rio was awarded the opportunity to host two major global sports events, World Cup 2014 and 2016 Olympics, it was clear that the issues of both infrastructure and crime needed to be addressed. Through an alliance between federal, state and municipal governments, a set of strategic policies called the Police Pacification Unit (UPP) was developed to rid the favelas of crime (Freeman [7]). Through the UPP process, police entered and occupied the favelas for indefinite period in an attempt to drive out the drug gangs. The UPP started as a pilot project in Santa Marta favela and has spread to over 36 other favelas. Most of the focus has been on favelas close to the planned sports events venues and more wealthy neighborhoods. Of the estimated1000 favelas in greater Rio, almost all of the UPP occupied favelas are in or adjacent to the wealthiest neighborhoods such as Zona Sul (South Zone). Prior to the World Cup 2014, the UPP occupied 40 favelas. The goal was to have 100 favelas UPP occupied before the 2016 Olympics. There has been a decrease in lethal crime since and a simultaneous increase in non-lethal crime since 2008 (Oosterbaan & Wijk [8]). It is believed increase in non-lethal crime is due to the fact that residents feel more comfortable in reporting these crimes as there is an increased police presence in selected favelas.

During the industrial capitalism period, poverty became commoditized into tourism product (Rezende-Parker,. Morrison, & Ismail [9]). Tourists' demand for authenticity outside the standardized tourism experience is an example of the commodification of poverty. During the 19th century, this type of tourism experience was available mainly in the slums of London and Manhattan. Today tours to poor, degraded urban areas have become increasingly popular in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro as well as other destinations such as India, Kenya, Indonesia and Detroit. These tours are now called "slum tourism" or "ghetto tourism" (Ma [10]).]). Two forms of tourism can be found in the favelas: 1) tours that are organized by members of the favela community to accept and host tours and 2) those tours that have no direct link to the favela community. In her study of tourism in the favelas, Rezende-

Parker [11] found that most of the tourism activity in Rio was in the southern sector with almost no tourism in the slums of the Northern Zone (Baixada Fluminense). She suggested that proliferation of tourism in the southern sector is a function of the fact that favela dwellers in that area have a much more spectacular view of the skyline and beaches.

Previous studies on perceptions of the favela show that 81% of people who have a *negative* perception of favelas get most of their information about the favelas through mainstream news sources and films. Only 18% of those having *positive* views of the favelas learned of them via mainstream news sources. Thirty percent (30%) of people who have positive impressions of the favelas developed these by traveling to Rio and being introduced through non-government organizations or other channels [2].

2.2 Tourism destination image and the favelas

Prior to 2002, there was a lack of academic research on tourism as an economic activity in Brazil. However in 2014 in the *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, Rezende-Parker et al. [9] reported that U.S. citizens were an important and highly attractive market for Brazil tourism. They found that most Americans knew little about the country, however, they were motivated to travel there due to the perceived reputation of the country as being exotic and having natural attractions. The average stay of an American tourist is 11.8 days which make them a valuable tourism market.

Because destination image is an important factor in the decision to visit a particular destination, the concept of destination image began to be examined as long ago as the 1970s . Baloglu & Cleary [13] developed a path model which identified that information sources, number of sources, age, education and motivation to travel were contributors to the overall destination image. Crompton [14] identified that image is a function of the person's impressions, ideas, and beliefs of the destination. Gartner [15] and Echtner & Ritchie [16] said that image is a blend of a person's intellectual perception as well as their feelings about the destination. The behavior or action of the person is based on their intellectual feelings and perceptions. In 2007 Tasci, Gartner, & Cavusgil [12] investigated how destinations conceptualize and operationalize their image since the early 1990s. Media reports and casual conversation are also two factors that have an impact on the perceptions [15].

Based on a series of structured attribute scales and unstructured (open ended) questions, Rezende et al. [9] conducted a factor analysis on the image of Brazil as a tourism destination. They found visitors had a significantly more positive image of all aspects of Brazil than non-visitors. The positive images of Brazil included: many interesting destinations to visit, natural parks, abundant wildlife, beautiful beaches, variety of music and dance, scenic beauty, friendly people, nightlife, adventure and cultural opportunities. On the other hand, negative images included: poor security,

lack of public transportation, crowded cities, lack of cleanliness and hygiene, beggars and language barriers.

King, Chen & Funk ([17] examined the decay of a destination's image following a major sports event. Using an attitude survey of attendees, they found that destination image decayed over time. They also noted that the pattern of image decay was a function of the tourist's psychological connection to the destination.
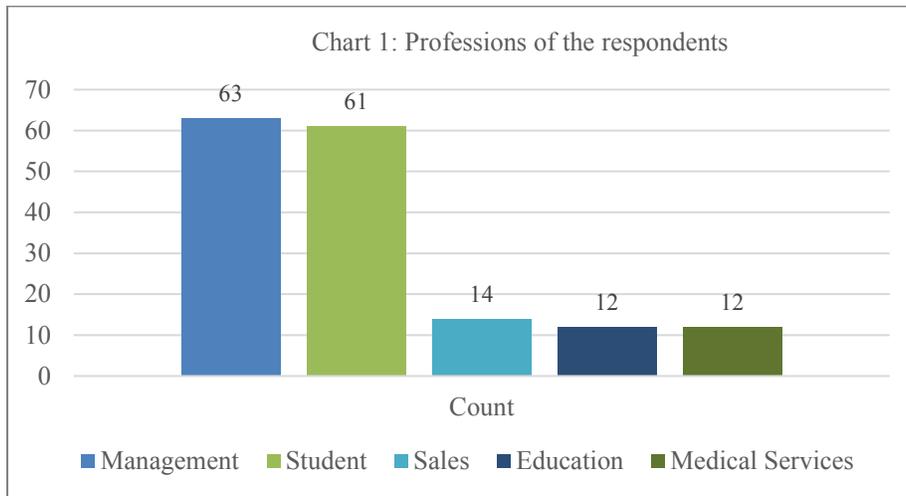
3 Methodology

The purpose of this research was to learn about perceptions of the favelas during and before the staging of mega events in Rio de Janeiro between 2014-2015. This project occurred in October 2014 approximately three months after the completion of the World Cup 2014.

The survey instrument was developed, tested and provided by a Brazilian non-governmental organization. The survey included both quantitative and qualitative questions regarding respondents opinions, image, and knowledge of the issues associated with the favelas in Rio. Surveyors were given a thorough training in interviewing skills and data collection as well as tips on how to approach potential respondents. In 10 teams of three surveyors were assigned survey time periods during peak traffic hours at Grand Central Station, Penn Station, Union Station and Wall Street Station. Each team was responsible for collecting a total of 25 surveys. Two hundred and fifty (250) people were surveyed.

4 Survey Results: Public Perceptions of Rio Favelas

4.1 Demographics

Of the people responding to the survey, 75.2% (n=188/250) had a bachelor degree or higher. The most common ethnicity was Caucasian (40.7%, n=94) followed by Asian/Pacific Islander (25.5%, n=59), Hispanic/Latino (19.9%, n=46) and African American (7.8%, n=18). Most of the respondents lived in the city (61.5%, n=150). The bulk of the respondents to this survey could be considered millennials (36.4%, n=91) followed by Generation X (23.6%, n=59). Most of the respondents were either students or employed in the field of management (Chart 1).

Chart 1: Professions of the respondents

Count	
Management	63
Student	61
Sales	14
Education	12
Medical Services	12

■ Management ■ Student ■ Sales ■ Education ■ Medical Services

4.2 Knowledge of and travel to a favela

Virtually all of the 250 people surveyed had heard of the term " favela" (96.4%, n=241) with no significant difference between the females and males. When asked about when they learned about the favelas, 71.3% (170/240) said they learned about favelas before the World Cup 2014 with only 23.1% (n=56/240) learning about the favelas during the coverage of the games (Chart 2). Only 37.6% (n=94) had actually travelled to Rio de Janeiro.

Chart 2: When did you first hear about favelas?

before the 2014 World Cup	71.3%
during the coverage of the 2014 World Cup	23.1%
after the 2014 World Cup had ended (August 2014 or later)	6.1%
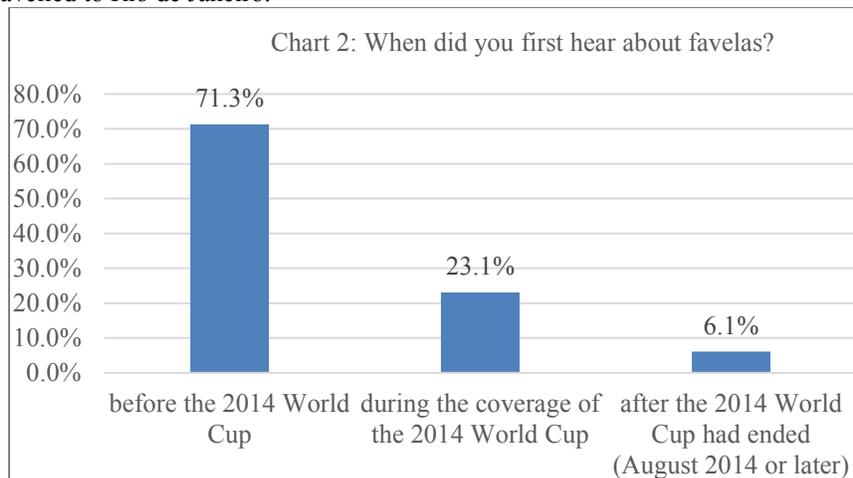
Fifty-two percent (52%, n=49) of the people who travelled to Rio ended up visiting a favela. The numbers of people who visit the favelas has increased over the past four (4) years (Table 1).

Table 1: Trends in visitation to favelas (1998 to 2014).

Year	Count	Percentage
2014	11	20.00
2013	10	18.18
2012	13	23.64
2011	4	7.27
2010	5	9.09
2009	1	1.82
2008	3	5.45
2007	2	3.64
2006	1	1.82
2005	2	3.64
2003	1	1.82
1999	1	1.82
1998	1	1.82
Total	55	100

Most of the visits to the Rio favelas were spontaneous independent visits (66%, n=34) whereas 22.7% (n=11) took organized tours offered by various tour companies (Chart 3).

Chart 3: Why did you go to a favela in Rio?

- Spontaneous independent visit — 65.9%
- Invitation from a friend living there — 6.8%
- Favela Tour — 22.7%
- 2.3%
- 2.3%
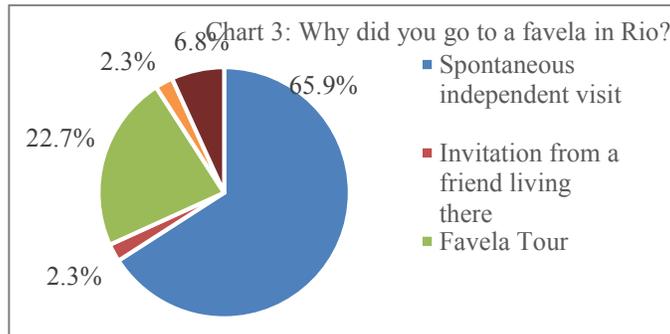
4.3 Opinions about the favela

Of those who visited the favelas, few could remember the specific name of the favela visited. About half (52%, n=25/49) knew if the favela they visited was pacified or not. Of those people who had been to a favela 75.2% (n=37/49) said that experience did not change their views while only 24.1% (n=12/49) said their views became more positive.

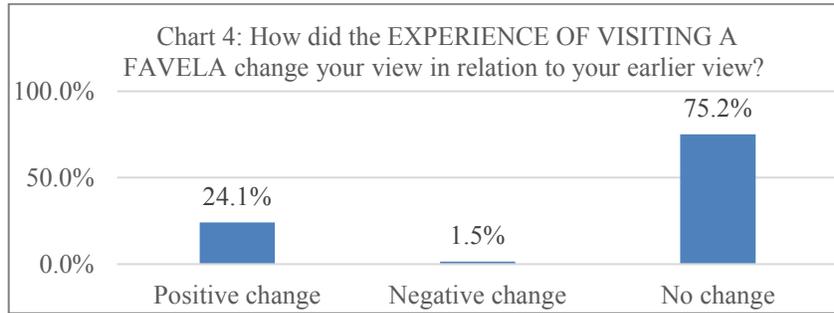The respondents were asked to rank their current views of the favelas as extremely unfavorable, unfavorable, mildly unfavorable, neutral, favorable and extremely favorable. Sixty percent (60%, n=150) of the respondents who previously reported unfavorable views of favelas still had the same unfavorable views.

Chart 4: How did the EXPERIENCE OF VISITING A FAVELA change your view in relation to your earlier view?

	Positive change	Negative change	No change
	24.1%	1.5%	75.2%

Most people learned about the favelas from mainstream news sources/networks (54.3%, n=114). The next most common way they learned about favelas was through travel to Brazil (14.8%, n=28) and through films/movies (13.3%, n=28). The most commonly mentioned movies were 'City of God" and " Fast and Furious". Very few learned about the favelas through work/research, alternative news sources, advocacy groups such as nonprofit organizations and charities.

Chart 5: Where did you first hear of a favela?

Mainstream news source		Work / Research		Traveling to Brazil		Video game
54.3%	7.1%	9.0%	2.4%	14.8%	13.3%	1.9%
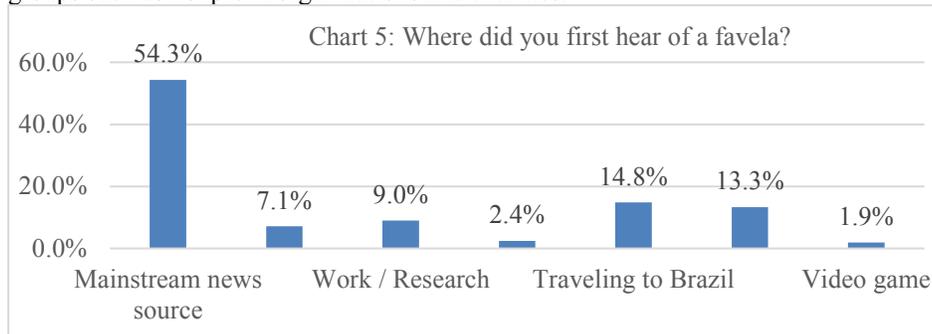
Chart 6 shows the type of mainstream new sources that provide information to the public about favelas with CNN being a primary source.

Chart 6 Mainstream new sources cited as a way to learn about favelas

	CNN	Local News paper	New York Post/ Times	TV	BBC	Inter net	WSJ	FOX	Radio	NBC	CBS
■ Count	80	56	52	47	39	38	29	26	26	24	17
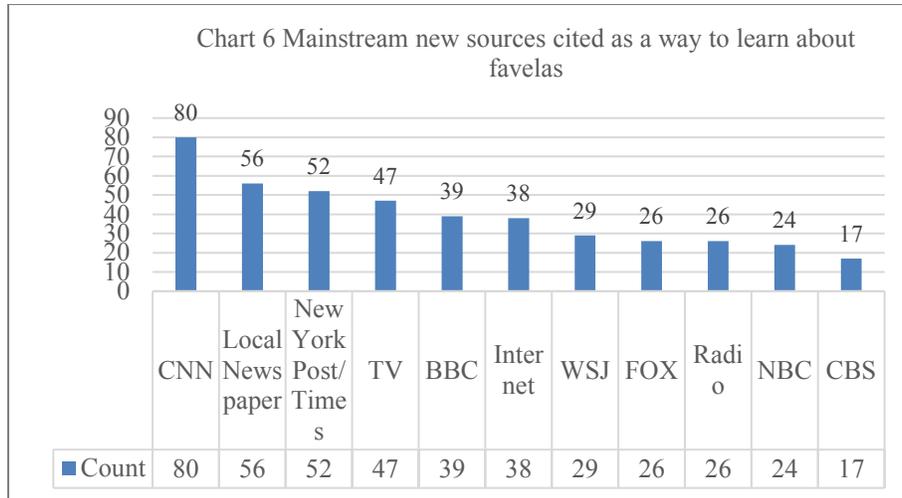
The respondents were asked to describe the Rio favelas in a few words. Their responses were compiled in a word picture which depicts the most commonly stated descriptors in larger size text and the small size text as the less common descriptors. The primary descriptors were all negative in conation- crime, dangerous, poor, poverty, dirty, ghetto and slum.

Figure 1: Word cloud that describes the Rio favelas according to the survey sample.

4.5 Interest in learning more about the favelas

Only 29.4% (n=64/218) were interested in learning more about favelas. Most respondents were not interested in learning more about Rio's favelas (70.3%, n=154). This fact supports Rezende's research on the lack of knowledge about Brazil.

5 Conclusions: Public Perceptions of Rio Favelas

The survey results indicate that regardless of the efforts taken by the federal, state and local government in Brazil, the favelas of Rio still present a negative image to the public which can, in turn, impact traveler's perception of the city and desire to travel there. The respondents in this study were educated, ethnically diverse and were represented by a high percentage of students and managers. Of those who travelled to Rio, half of them ended up visiting a favela for one reason or another, but they were unaware of the level of pacification of the favela that they visited. Of those visiting the favelas, most said that their visit did not change their initial unfavorable views. Most respondents knew about the favelas before the global coverage of the World Cup 2014. The most common way that the respondents learned about the favelas was through mainstream media and film/movies which has also been demonstrated in past research [2].

   Overall, the descriptors of the favelas continue to be negative as demonstrated by the word cloud featuring terms that respondents suggested about the favelas such as scary, dirty, crime, poverty, and dangerous . These descriptors are similar with those identified by Rezende et al.. [9] who conducted a factor analysis of the negative

images on Brazil as a destination such as lack of security, lack of public transportation, crowded cities, lack of cleanliness and hygiene, beggars and language barriers. Our results also show that people who have visited the favelas were NOT more likely to have a positive opinions of them which is inconsistent with the findings of Williamson [2].

Most of the information people know about the favelas is gathered from mainstream news media. A second source is movie/ film, both of which often focus on the crime in favelas. Interest in slum tourism visits to the favelas is on the rise. However, few respondents were interested in learning more about the favela. Rezende et al. [9] found that Americans knew little about Brazil and our study showed they were not really interested in learning more.

6 Recommendations: Public Perceptions of Rio Favelas

Because the image of Rio favelas is so negative, efforts to promote positive news through mainstream media is suggested. Less emphasis on crime and drugs in Brazilian film would also contribute to a better image of the Rio favelas. Filmmakers could focus on the more positive aspects of Rio. To improve perceptions of the favela, news releases of the positive improvements in infrastructure, housing, sanitation, environment, and access to gyms for use by the local community should be featured. The pacification of the favelas should continue more aggressively to favela all over the city as opposed to mainly focusing on area most frequented by tourists. It would also be advisable to capitalize on the positive images such as interesting destinations to visit, natural parks, abundant wildlife, beautiful beaches, variety of music and dance, scenic beauty, friendly people, nightlife, adventure and cultural opportunities as demonstrated in recent research by Rezende et al. [9].

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